

HYGIENE OF THE HOUSEHOLD

By EVELEEN HARRISON

Graduate Post-Graduate Hospital, New York City

(Continued from Vol. II., page 920)

IN my last paper I entered somewhat into the subject of daily bathing as a means of keeping strong and healthy, and pointed out its importance in the prevention of disease. Let us now go a step further and talk about baths in time of illness.

In the lives of most women (and perhaps a few men) will come a time when the knowledge of how to give a bath with skill and gentleness to an invalid will prove of much worth, either for personal application or for the instruction of others. For if in every home we find the "vacant chair," how much the more may we say in every home, sooner or later, we find the invalid. Sometimes a case of slight illness requiring only a few days' rest and the loving care of the "home nurse," sometimes a chronic invalid who will welcome gladly the refreshing bath by the hands of a dear one when too tired to accomplish it without aid, and again a sudden severe illness or a case of emergency out of the reach of a "trained nurse" will call forth the powers of those near at hand.

In former pages I explained the great need of the daily bath to keep the pores open and the skin in good condition. If this is necessary when the body is strong and active, how much the more when the system is weakened by illness and the circulation impaired or interfered with by want of exercise. I have heard it remarked that "baths were not necessary while remaining in bed, for one was not likely to get dirty"! a sentiment which my up-to-date readers will justly scorn, as they know that the mere fact of remaining in bed will not interfere with nature's method of throwing off the waste material from the blood by means of the sweat-glands, and, further, that when the system is weakened by illness it requires all the aid we can give it to reduce feverish symptoms and restless nerves, and by keeping the outer surface fresh and clean enable the internal machinery the better to carry on its work.

Two points I would especially emphasize when giving a bath to an invalid,—viz., forethought and gentleness. Nervous invalids find it particularly trying to be left—perhaps half dried or in an uncomfortable position—while the nurse runs out of the room for extra towels, fresh water, clean clothing, etc. All you require should be at hand before commencing the bath,—clean night-gown (airing before the fire or in the sun), small blanket to replace the bedclothes during the bath, a large

basin of hot water on a chair or table near the bed, soap, towels, wash-cloth, sponge, bath-towel, and a pitcher of hot water in case the water in the basin grows cool. A little alcohol to rub briskly on after the bath, followed by talcum powder, is very grateful to the patient.

According as it is given, the bath may be a great help or a great hinderance in sickness. When preparing to give a bath for the first time to one of my private patients I was surprised to find that she shrank from it, giving as her reason that she was afraid of catching cold, as she would have to be entirely uncovered! One practical lesson, however, was sufficient to assure her that her objection was quite unnecessary, and thereafter she looked forward to the daily bath with great pleasure.

The bath may be given entirely under cover of the blanket, or, if thought best, one part of the body may be uncovered, washed, dried, and the blanket replaced before proceeding with the second edition.

Not until all appliances are on hand and the room warm and free from draughts should the patient's clothing be removed, after which throw the bath-blanket over the bed and hold it up in place with one hand while with the other you slip down underneath the bedcoverings, thus preventing any exposure of the invalid.

The face is washed first, then the neck, arms, chest, and abdomen; turn the patient on one side to reach the back and finish with the legs and feet. The bath-towel is slipped under each portion of the body in turn as you bathe it.

Use long, firm—but not too heavy—strokes; both in washing and drying they are far more soothing than short dabs. Dry thoroughly each portion immediately after washing. When the bath is over remove towels and blanket, slip on clean night-clothes, and draw up the bed-covering. To remove the night-gown, if your invalid is unable to sit up in bed, the simplest way is to push it up under the back as far as the shoulders, then, raising the head gently with one hand, use the other to slip the night-gown over the head and then off the arms, and when you replace it again put both arms in first, then slip over the head and gently pull it down under the back.

Twenty minutes is sufficient time to allow for the bath, and it is best given either before breakfast or between ten and eleven.

Unless one has been ill and obliged to remain in bed for days, it is impossible to realize how refreshing and restful the daily bath is. During a recent illness I appreciated as I never had before what comfort and rest there is in good nursing, and the greatest luxury of the day was the morning bath given by skilful and gentle hands.

(To be continued.)